

Washington, DC— In testimony before the House Judiciary Committee, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) expressed his strong opposition to the Bush Administration's efforts to absolve Iraq of liability for torturing Americans during the 1991 Gulf War. American POWs tortured during this conflict had been awarded financial compensation by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. However, the Administration issued an executive order which precluded payment of the settlement to the American POWs and it also precluded settlement of similar claims for a group of American civilians held as hostages or human shields. In December 2007, the President vetoed the Defense Authorization bill to block a measure that would have removed some immunity from the Iraqi government. Congressman Sestak in conjunction with Congressman Bruce Braley (D-IA) are proposing legislation which would give the Iraqi government 90 days to provide fair restitution to the victims or the waiver of immunity for the Iraqi government would be repealed. — "Having traveled to scores of countries over the time I served in the Navy, I have observed that while we are respected for the power of our economy and the power of our military, we are admired for the power of our ideals," said Congressman Sestak in his testimony. "There is no power greater than the power of our ideals under the rule of law...We need to support our troops under the rule of law."

In the 2003 suit brought by 17 American POWs and 37 of their family members, Iraq, Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi Intelligence Service were found liable for \$653 million in compensatory damages and \$306 million in punitive damages. Congressman Sestak attempted to insert an amendment into the National Defense Authorization Act of 2009 to take away Iraq's immunity unless outstanding American POW claims were settled within 90 days, but the provision was ruled not germane to the bill.

The Congressman continues to fight to fairly resolve this issue today, arguing that forgiving Iraq would not only put captured American troops in more danger in the future, but would also send a message to the American people that the new Iraqi government is not committed to the rule of law.

"After World War Two, the United States agreed to the third great Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War (POWs), that we would never absolve any state of its liability for illegal torture," said the Congressman in testimony. "In 1991, American POWs were tortured illegally under the rule of law. In the military, you train us through providing rules and regulations never to stain our nation through the use of torture, and we expect the same contract if we were to be tortured."

Through Congressman Sestak's proposal, this matter can be quickly settled for only a fraction of one year's interest earned by Iraq on its \$30 billion held in U.S. banks. In addition, Congressman Sestak's proposal still serves the interests of the reconstruction of Iraq by forgiving as much as 77 percent of judgments against Iraq, including all punitive damages and two-thirds of compensatory damages.

"Each month we spend almost \$12 billion for the War in Iraq," said Congressman Sestak. "And it's time to support the men and women who wore the cloth of this nation, who were tortured during a war, and who had already won a judgment against the Iraqi government."

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.